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SUBJECT: CAMBODIA BORDER CROSSING VISITS HIGHLIGHT TIP CHALLENGES, STRATEGIES

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Cambodian National Police officials from the Anti-Human Trafficking and Juvenile Protection Department (AHTJP) recently joined Emboffs at the Poipet border crossing area of Banteay Meanchey province to highlight the Cambodia-Thailand cross-border trafficking in persons (TIP) situation. During the visit, police discussed TIP trends, challenges, and strategies to combat TIP. AHTJP officials confirmed the recent removal of two border police officials for corruption. During a separate cross-border TIP-focused trip to the Cambodia-Vietnam border province of Svay Rieng, Emboffs learned that while TIP from Cambodia into Vietnam does not occur at the main Bavet border checkpoint, there appear to be significant numbers of adults and children who cross into Vietnam to beg through smaller border gates and through areas where there are no official border crossing points; some of those crossing the border are trafficked and/or are led by recruiters. Svay Rieng is recognized for having a model anti-TIP provincial working group under the National Task Force structure; however, the province has not seen a reported TIP arrest since 2003. A province-level MOSAVY office and police coordinated with Vietnamese authorities to repatriate 753 Cambodians from Vietnam in 2008, 182 of whom were identified by the MOSAVY office as TIP victims. End Summary.

Embassy and Police Joint Visit to Poipet Border Crossing

¶2. (SBU) The national-level Anti-Human Trafficking and Juvenile Protection Department (AHTJP) accompanied Emboffs on March 16 and 17 to the Cambodia border town of Poipet, the busiest border-crossing point from Cambodia into Thailand, to engage in dialogue on cross-border trafficking issues with local police and immigration officials. The AHTJP assembled approximately 10 officials from the Banteay Meanchey province police department, Banteay Meanchey province anti-TIP unit, and the O'Chrov district (where Poipet is located) police department to discuss strategies to combat TIP; the AHTJP also took the initiative to include NGO International Justice Mission (IJM) in the Poipet meetings, as a respected partner in Cambodia anti-TIP law enforcement activities.

¶3. (SBU) During the meeting, a Banteay Meanchey province deputy police commissioner reported that in January 2009, 32,249 illegal migrants were returned by Thai authorities to Cambodia, 1,673 of whom were children, 21,702 male, and 10,547 female. He did not identify how many of these illegal migrants were TIP victims, but stated that trafficking victims who cross the border into Thailand come from a wide variety of Cambodian provinces in search of income-generating opportunities (distant provinces such as Prey Veng and Kampong Cham, and closer areas such as Battambang, Kampong Thom, and Siem Reap). He said one person from Prey Veng province had sold the family cows to pay for the journey to cross the border. He stated that information dissemination activities in communities near the border have had little effect because migrants come to the area from other parts of

the country and stay for a short time before entering Thailand. He stated that many are targeted by recruiters who persuade victims they can find work for a decent wage in Thailand, but end up being sold to exploitative employers.

¶4. (SBU) The Banteay Meanchey province deputy police commissioner told the group that most TIP cases come to the Banteay Meanchey police through complaints of family members of those who have been trafficked. However, the police lack the expertise and resources to investigate alleged recruiters. AHTJP Deputy Director Pak Youleang recommended that the Banteay Meanchey and O'Chrov police work more closely with TIP victims to identify recruiters and to elicit testimony that can be used as evidence during investigations and prosecutions. Pak Youleang also requested that local police report TIP cases to the Banteay Meanchey anti-TIP unit for investigation support, and to work together with NGOs which could have further expertise to provide services to the victim, and to encourage victims to provide testimony to identify traffickers.

Banteay Meanchey Police Working Group

¶5. (SBU) Banteay Meanchey provincial police, provincial anti-TIP unit police, and district police agreed to Pak Youleang's idea to form a temporary police investigation working group to include two officers from each unit that would collaborate with immigration police to interview laborers leaving Cambodia as well as individuals who are returned to Cambodia from Thailand to obtain information about recruiters. He stated the group's first goal will be

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to arrest three or four recruiters to start putting the message out that TIP will not be tolerated. He stated that the collaboration between the members of the police working group may also have the effect of building up the capabilities of non-anti-TIP unit agents who might not be as familiar with anti-TIP law enforcement techniques.

Need for More Collaboration with Immigration and Border Officials

¶6. (SBU) During a separate meeting with AHTJP, Banteay Meanchey anti-TIP, and Banteay Meanchey immigration police officials, a Banteay Meanchey immigration police deputy chief agreed to cooperate with a provincial-level police working group to identify and investigate cross-border TIP cases, and to ensure victims are referred to appropriate victim service providers such as NGOs and the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans, and Youth (MOSAVY)-operated Poipet Transit Center (PTC). Banteay Meanchey anti-TIP unit director Oum Sath told Emboffs that a lack of willingness to cooperate on the part of military border protection units has been a hurdle to targeting cross-border TIP cases. Oum Sath stated that border protection officials at the international border crossing in Poipet are cooperative, but not officials at the other, smaller border crossings in the province, where anti-TIP police have the impression that they cannot go into some of the border zones because it is perceived that they are interfering in the work of the border protection units. He added that in cases where local border units or police do provide information on trafficking cases, the information is usually at least several days old, proving too late to conduct a raid or disrupt an operation.

¶7. (SBU) Oum Sath identified border protection units 911, 891, and 895 as units whose cooperation would be critical in the effort to eliminate TIP, and requested USG, AHTJP, and NGO assistance in suggesting that the Banteay Meanchey anti-TIP unit set up satellite offices at two of the main border crossing points outside of Poipet called Beung Tkuon and Malai where the police could work together with local units and NGOs to disseminate anti-TIP information, and

research, identify, investigate and arrest recruiters.
(Note: If 1207 funds are approved for Cambodia, post will assess the feasibility of funding for the Cambodia-Thailand border protection unit in order to further cooperation with anti-TIP police. End Note.)

Removal of Two Poipet Immigration Officials

¶ 18. (SBU) During the Poipet visit, Banteay Meanchey anti-TIP unit director Oum Sath confirmed earlier news from AHTJP Director Bith Kimhong that in December 2008 and January 2009 the chief of the O'Chrov district police unit and one immigration official who worked at the Poipet border crossing were removed from their positions for "not paying attention to" possible TIP cases, and for taking bribes from persons crossing the border. Bith Kimhong reported in early March that one of the officers had received complaints from persons who were reportedly returned to Cambodia after having been trafficked to Thailand, but the officer did not submit the complaints to the court in accordance with standard police procedure to prosecute cases.

Banteay Meanchey Anti-TIP Unit Willingness High,
Capability Low

¶ 19. (SBU) IJM Investigator Ron Dunne reported to Poloff that IJM has been working with Banteay Meanchey Anti-TIP Unit Director Oum Sath for a number of years, and considered him one of the better-trained, and more committed and motivated police officers conducting anti-TIP work. Dunne stated that while the AHTJP police invited IJM to Poipet to participate in meetings together with emboffs and police, he was using this as an opportunity to investigate tip-offs IJM received from Oum Sath regarding no fewer than 50 brothels that Oum Sath suspected might be providing underage victims to clients. IJM Country Director stated that when he asked Oum Sath why he had not yet conducted operations against the brothels, Oum Sath said that the Banteay Meanchey Anti-TIP Unit was waiting for the expertise of IJM to assist in investigating the tip-offs.

Poipet Transit Center

¶ 110. (SBU) While in Poipet, Emboffs visited the O'Chrov

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district office of the MOSAVY Poipet Transition Center (PTC), a temporary shelter for unaccompanied children who are returned to Cambodia from Thailand. The shelter was established in 2000 with the assistance of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and IOM played an advisory role in the PTC until 2008 when IOM handed complete operations over to MOSAVY. The PTC works to locate the families of TIP victims, reintegrate victims into their families and communities, refer some victims to NGOs for extended care, and monitor and follow-up with reintegration cases. The facility was clean, had separate rooms for male and female children, and the director seemed knowledgeable about victim care. Victims are referred to the PTC by immigration police who screen Cambodian returnees from Thailand to determine age and whether returnees are TIP victims. In 2008, the PTC provided shelter to 101 victims, and the PTC director stated that the center can house about 10 children at a time. The PTC director stated that 22 children were reintegrated into their families in 2008, and the remainder were referred to NGO partners for long-term services and care. The PTC refers victims to: Krousar Thmey, Don Bosco, Cambodian Women's Crisis Center (CWCC), Damneuk Teuk, Komah Rikreay, Mitapiep Komar, Komar Nay Prohm Daen, AFESIP, Nearey Thmey, HAGAR, and Mith Samlanh.

Svay Rieng Province as a Source of Child Beggars in Vietnam

¶11. (SBU) During a separate March 13 visit to the Cambodia-Vietnam border province of Svay Rieng, one NGO, the Cambodian Center for the Protection of Children's Rights (CCPCR), estimated that 10 children cross into Vietnam illegally every day to beg, sell lottery tickets, or sell flowers. Police and NGO representatives stated that they believe most illegal migration into Vietnam for begging takes place through the smaller border checkpoints along the Cambodia-Vietnam border, and through areas where there are no official border crossing gates. Many people who cross at border points illegally wait until dark or until border officials are on lunch breaks to cross when officials are less likely to see them or to pay attention. It is believed that little illegal migration for begging takes place across the main border gate at Bavet, where immigration police estimated that 900 to 1,800 persons crossed to and from Vietnam every day.

¶12. (SBU) The Cambodian NGO Watnakpheap conducts prevention activities such as income-generation activities, and outreach to local communities where persons are at risk of being trafficked into Vietnam. The NGO's director told Poloff that many children cross the border together with a relative, such as older siblings or parents, some children cross the border on their own, and others cross with the help of recruiters. He stated that in most cases when children are led by recruiters to beg in Vietnam, parents are complicit in the process.

¶13. (SBU) The Watnakpheap director confirmed statements of local MOSAVY and NGO contacts that parents who fall on hard financial times or who fall into serious debt due to, for example, a family member falling ill and requiring medical care, or other family emergency, will frequently solicit a recruiter in their community to loan them money in exchange for their child going to Vietnam to beg with the recruiter's begging ring connections. Recruiters are generally well known to other community members, and are financially better off than their neighbors. During a drive through parts of Chantrea district of Svay Rieng, one interlocutor was able to point out five or six houses of recruiters in one community. Their houses were generally made of painted wood planks raised off of the ground by stilts (to protect from flooding), in contrast to most other villagers' houses made of unpainted mud or tree branches and built at ground level.

Svay Rieng Police Acknowledge Lack of Ability

¶14. (SBU) The Svay Rieng province anti-TIP police unit appeared to be less active and less capable than its counterparts in Banteay Meanchey province along the Cambodia-Thailand border. The Svay Rieng unit was housed in a small, unpainted, nearly empty outbuilding at the edge of the police station property behind a row of hedges and other buildings. One police official requested USG assistance for further training on investigating recruiters. He stated that UNICEF had provided funding to build a separate room in the unit's office where police can privately interview child victims and videotape their testimony. The police reported that they last arrested a husband and wife pair of recruiters

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in 2003; however, the wife was actually allowed to "escape" arrest because the couple had children and there would be no one to take care of their children if both parents were arrested. The husband was convicted in 2005 and sentenced to 20 years in prison.

¶15. (SBU) Svay Rieng province anti-TIP police reported that if they take serious action against child begging perpetrators in source communities, there will be many children left behind whose parents have been arrested and who have no one to take care of them. They also stated that they have recently been investigating 14 TIP cases but that the

victims in these cases have not cooperated with police; the Svay Rieng anti-TIP police director stated that he believes that many of the victims are unwilling to report who trafficked them because it is a parent or someone else close to the victims and who the victims do not want to incriminate. (Note: While the Svay Rieng anti-TIP unit did seem to be inadequately trained and equipped to carry out TIP investigations, Emboffs welcomed their openness regarding the unit's shortcomings and about TIP crimes in Svay Rieng communities. End Note.)

Recent IOM Statistics and Outstanding IOM Work

¶16. (SBU) IOM recently made available to Emboffs statistics from their work in Svay Rieng province on the return and reintegration of trafficked and other vulnerable women and children from Vietnam. The goal of IOM's programming in the province is to increase return and reintegration interventions to reduce, and eventually eliminate, trafficking and irregular migration activities that put people at risk of trafficking from Cambodia to Vietnam. Of the more than 1,000 Cambodians whom IOM assisted in returning from Vietnam, nearly all were originally from Kampong Ro and Chantrea districts of Svay Rieng; 67 percent were children and 33 percent were adults; 94 percent reported that they went to Vietnam voluntarily, four percent said they were "rented" to recruiters, and two percent said they were forced to go. Among trafficking victims interviewed, facilitators of migration to Vietnam for begging were reported to be: relatives (more than 60 cases), self (more than 50 cases), siblings (more than 50 cases), neighbors (more than 30 cases), and parents (nearly 20 cases).

¶17. (SBU) IOM Cambodia appears to have done outstanding work in coordinating and educating Svay Rieng province government officials and NGOs regarding how best to return and reintegrate Cambodian migrants from Vietnam, and prevent Cambodians from departing to Vietnam in the first place. IOM's work has been funded by PRM since October 2006; project funding from PRM came to an end in December 2008. IOM works with local MOSAVY and Ministry of Women's Affairs representatives, the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, UNICEF, CCPCR, Watnakpheap, and other donors to increase service providers' capacity, and build links between Cambodian and Vietnamese government officials in order to facilitate a smooth migrant and trafficking victim repatriation process.

¶18. (SBU) CCPCR and Watnakpheap are the only two local NGOs working on the ground in Svay Rieng communities, and both NGOs' representatives reported their high regard for IOM staff who have sought to understand the situation on the ground, and to bring together the appropriate resources and government agencies to respond to community needs. (COMMENT: Clearly there is a great need in Svay Rieng province for additional NGO services that could assist with micro-credit and other income-generation projects, scholarship programs for children to remain in school, and community outreach programs to discourage family members from sending their children to Vietnam to beg. END COMMENT.) In Poipet during Emboffs' visit to the Cambodia-Thailand border, local NGOs and MOSAVY officials also paid tribute to the past effective work of IOM, and expressed regret that IOM had to pull most of their services from the area due to project funding coming to an end.

Porous Border Points Permit More Than Trafficking in Persons

¶19. (SBU) Emboffs visited small border gates in the Chantrea district of Svay Rieng province along the Vietnam border, and in the Malai and O'Chrov districts of Banteay Meanchey province along the Cambodia-Thailand border. One contact in a Cambodia-Vietnam border community stated that despite police and border officials' presence at small border crossings, more than just migrating persons seemed to be

crossing the border illegally. The contact stated that he had seen large semi trucks carrying timber offload cargo onto smaller trucks before reaching smaller dirt roads to cross the border at small crossing gates, and then those trucks cross into Vietnam without inspection. The contact stated he had seen shipments of medicines, CDs and DVDs cross the smaller border points uninspected, too. When Emboffs visited a one-lane, dirt path border crossing in the O'Chrov district along the Cambodia-Thailand border, six border protection unit officials who were playing volleyball within eye-shot of the gate told Emboffs to do whatever they wanted at the border gates, just not to bother the border unit officials when they were "busy." A motorbike taxi driver sleeping by the border gate permitted the embassy vehicle access to the area by lifting the large pole that served as a gate allowing the vehicle entry. While security at the border gate appeared to be lax, Emboffs observed only the movement of people, and not goods, at this border point.

Comment

¶20. (SBU) Embassy visits to the opposite ends of Cambodia highlighted the fact that trafficking in persons challenges stretch across the country. Most interlocutors communicated that poverty and the pursuit of income drive Cambodian citizens to migrate across borders, their financial straits making them vulnerable to trafficking, exploitation, and other mistreatment. Police have not yet been able to effectively stop the traffickers who prey on Cambodia's impoverished people, but police and other government officials are committed to eliminating the scourge and are seeking better methods to investigate and arrest perpetrators, and to assist and learn from victims, including through increased cooperation with NGOs and civil society partners.

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